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“Wish you were here”? Geographies of exclusion: young people, coastal towns and marginality

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Within youth studies there is a growing body of research that pays attention to the importance of *place* in shaping young people’s identities, life opportunities and intergenerational relationships [Cuervo, H., and J. Wyn. 2014. “Reflections on the Use of Spatial and Relational Metaphors in Youth Studies.” *Journal of Youth Studies* 17 (7): 901–915; Farrugia, D. 2014. “Towards a Spatialised Youth Sociology: the Rural and the Urban in Times of Change.” *Journal of Youth Studies* 17 (3): 293–307; Woodman, D., and J. Wyn. 2015. *Youth and Generation: Rethinking Change and Inequality in the Lives of Young People*. Sage Publications]. Of critical importance to these discussions is the need to explore notions of ‘belonging’ and social citizenship, interrogating the extent to which differing perceptions and experiences contribute towards variations in the outcomes and life chances of disadvantaged young people. This article draws upon ethnography, participatory arts-based research, and semi-structured interviews (n31) with young people (15–25) who live in a deprived coastal town in the North of England. The research investigated processes of marginalisation and disconnection from the perspectives of young people who were deemed as disengaged, or ‘at risk’ of disengagement, from education, employment or training. The research took place during a time of rapid change and uncertainty as Britain voted to leave the EU. The findings of this study will ‘throw light’ on the how contemporary classed subjectivities are formed, how experiences of inequality and austerity are made sense of, and how, within a turbulent political context, young people negotiate complex transitions to adulthood.

Introduction

As global forces continue to deepen structural divisions, there is growing interest in the relationship between social mobility, place and inequality. This is especially the case in the U.S.A., U.K. and Eastern Europe, where the spatial configurations of economic and social deprivation have become synonymous with the narrative of people and places characterised as ‘left behind’. Within the field of youth studies, theoretical analysis of social change, particularly the dynamics and changing nature of inequalities, is well documented (Furlong and Cartmel 2007). More recently, analysis of contemporary young lives, has witnessed a growing body of research that pays close attention to the importance of *place* in shaping young people’s identities, life opportunities and intergenerational relationships (Cuervo and Wyn 2014; Farrugia 2014; Woodman and Wyn 2015). One of the central themes that run through much of this research is the need to explore the material inequalities of particular localities, alongside the meanings, feelings and emotions that young people attach to particular places. This is especially pertinent for the context of the U.K. where the 2016 referendum result to leave the European Union, has been utilised as an example of what can happen when long-term geographical impacts associated with decades of sustained economic decline are neglected from meaningful political and policy intervention.

The positioning of Brexit as a symbolic marker of wider social problems has reinvigorated interest in the contemporary relationship between people and places, allowing issues such as social mobility in coastal towns to creep up the political agenda (SMC 2017; HoL 2019). Within this context, mainstream policy and media have found themselves encountering a range of provocative questions, most notably, the extent to which Brexit is symbolic of an increasingly divided and polarised society. Voting preferences of the EU referendum showed

large cities and towns were more likely to vote remain, whilst ageing towns, voted to leave (Jennings and Stoker 2019). Whilst recognising important critiques on the interpretation of the EU referendum (Bhambra 2017), research has also shown the importance of spatial contexts where factors such as low wages, weak labour markets and broader indices of inequality help explain the voting patterns of the EU referendum (Clarke, Goodwin, and Whiteley 2017). Jennings and Lodge (2019) reference the complex conditions that shaped the context leading up to the EU referendum. Here, three key explanatory frameworks are outlined: (1) electoral politics and fragmentation of the party system, (2) a crisis of the neoliberal policy paradigm, and the (3) hyper-politicised regulatory state. Drawing upon the work of Jessop (2017), they make the important note that 'Brexit was both a singular event and a symptom of an ongoing crisis of the British state and society' (Jennings and Lodge 2019, 774). As O'Conner (2019) most aptly asserts, 'Seaside towns are not a world apart from the rest of us – they're holding up a mirror to our economy's wider failings. It's time we stopped looking away'.

This context sets the background for the examination of the restructuring of coastal towns in the U.K., before exploring the experiences of young people who grow up in such contexts. At a time when political democracies are being called into question, the perspectives of young people are central to our understanding of the current crisis and future direction of traditional party politics. These issues are not confined to the U.K., but rather, represent a crisis of global politics more generally. Nationalist and protectionist populism are evidenced in the reactionary populism of Trump in the U.S. (Fraser 2017), and growing support for radical populist parties across Europe (Rodriguez-Pose 2018). This geographical polarisation of voting behaviour, including the relationship between populism and economic insecurity, brings 'place' centre stage. For young people who have grown up experiencing entrenched deprivation and hardship, what meanings do they attach to such politically turbulent times? If major social transformations are unfolding before us, then it is young people who are at the crossroads of the process of social transformation. It is young people who are growing up in these unusual, politically volatile and uncertain times, and it is their experiences that will help us understand the reproduction of social divisions, how they play out in new ways, and in different contexts (Furlong and Cartmel 2007).

Geographies of exclusion: entrenched deprivation in U.K. coastal towns.

Despite a lack of policy and research into the circumstances of coastal towns, several attempts have been made to document higher levels of social and economic deprivation (Beatty, Fothergill, and Wilson 2008) and low social mobility rates (SMC 2017). A recent report by a House of Lords Select Committee referred to the perception of seaside towns 'being a national embarrassment', stating that 'for too long our seaside towns have felt isolated, unsupported and left behind' (HoL 2019, 6). Quantitative analysis of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) by Agarwal and Brunt (2006) found that coastal and seaside districts had wards with severe pockets of deprivation. In 2018, Agarwal et al. devised a typology of highly deprived coastal towns that illustrated the persistent, complex, spatial clustering of deprivation in larger seaside resorts (Agarwal et al. 2018, 450).

Other indicators of deprivation include poor transport links and connectivity that create additional barriers to the access of labour markets and services (HoL 2019). The transience of populations (Leonard 2015), combined with the distinct housing markets of seaside towns (Ward 2015), demonstrate the complex spatial clustering of multiple deprivation in deprived coastal towns. With regards to housing, the relationship between the prevalence of Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and population transience of vulnerable groups of adults and

children on sickness related benefits, and/or in care homes/hostels, has also been highlighted as challenging, especially the demands placed on local services (HoC 2007; Ward 2015). Coastal towns also have an unequal distribution of an ageing population (Centre for towns 2018), that create challenges in supporting the provision of adequate health services. Concerns over population projections of coastal towns have recently been voiced, with headlines such as 'Small towns left behind as exodus of youth to cities accelerates' being symptomatic of this (Burn-Murdoch 2017).

There are also challenges around the prevalence of drug and alcohol misuse, with a recent ONS report showing that some seaside towns in England and Wales had the highest rates of death from misuse of heroin/morphine (ONS 2018). Those living in deprived coastal towns are also more likely to experience poor health (HoC 2007, 72–3), with research showing that 'among the 20 local authorities in England and Wales with bad or very bad health (according to the 2011 census), 10 were coastal communities' (Corfe 2017, 4). Whilst recognising the need for a contextualised understanding of coastal towns, commonalities across international studies on rurality, include issues such as underemployment, the out-migration of working age populations, and higher rates of poverty and deprivation. (see Shucksmith and Brown 2006). However, it is important to remember that the issues facing coastal towns play out in place specific ways. For instance, within the U.K. there are significant differences in the circumstances of more affluent coastal towns when compared to the deprived coastal contexts that have been described above (see Beatty, Fothergill, and Wilson 2008). This reinforces the need for a more nuanced placed based analysis that avoids conflating the experiences of coastal communities with variable social, economic and historical legacies.

Forms of marginalisation and disconnection: young people's school to work transitions in deprived coastal towns/non-urban places

It is clear that understanding contemporary youth transitions entails situating debates of complex, multiple deprivation within a broader analysis of youth non-urban experience. However, in a similar vein to the dominant analysis of urban cities, the contemporary youth transitions literature has a tendency to concentrate on issues that young people face in urban deindustrialised towns or cities. Conflating the experiences of young people who share similar socio-economic circumstances, but for whom the processes, and experience of social exclusion, are distinctly different due to spatial context, is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, normative youth transitions are constructed around a metrocentric model that has arisen from the major traditions of youth sociology excluding rural young people from the development of key theories (Farrugia 2014). Within these foundational theories, the significance of place can be downplayed, impacting not only upon the representation of 'problematic' youth transitions, but the policy and practice 'solutions' offered. Within the context of late modernity, Farrugia foregrounds the spatial processes between the rural and the urban arguing that:

> … the same global processes that have profoundly reshaped the lives of urban youth have profoundly influenced rural young people, whose transitions demonstrate spatial dimensions of these changes. In particular, economic shifts at both the global and national levels have created new geographic inequalities with profound consequences for young people outside urban centres. (Farrugia 2014, 298)

For instance, a key consequence of global forces is the requirement that young people who live in rural areas undergo a form of geographic 'disembedding' (Corbett 2009;), a term partly used to describe the necessity for rural youth to become mobile in order to withstand

the ‘poor’ outcomes associated with the material inequalities of particular places (Farrugia 2016). The importance of understanding how place is a structural category in the construction of young people’s identities and transitions to adulthood is echoed across international research on rural youth. For instance, within a Canadian context, the work of Corbett has highlighted how formal schooling in rural areas serves to promote mobility and movement as a route to educational success. Here, Corbett illustrates how the spatial politics of schooling perpetuate the assumption that those ‘who remain in rural places as somehow deficient’ (Corbett 2009, 2), whilst localised cultural benchmarks of ‘success’ are largely ignored. Research on young people and rurality in the U.K. have highlighted the ‘meaning making’ surrounding attachment to place and people, with young people demonstrating an awareness of the impacts of economic decline that drive potential aspirations of migration, but how this is contextualised by the ‘benefits of being surrounded by family and friends who have no plans to leave’ (Jamieson 2000, 218). In Denmark, academic ‘high achievers’ in rural areas have been shown to encounter conflicting feelings of attachment to place, including feelings of pride and nostalgia of ‘idyll childhoods’, that interject with desires for an urban life that will provide opportunities for freedom and self-expression, whilst also avoiding the stigma and stereotypes associated with ‘those left behind’ (Pedersen and Gram 2018). Research studies in Australia have shown this to be further complicated by the social and cultural hierarchy attached to particular places, including the notion that urban areas are sites for ‘cool’ youth culture, and how in turn, this impacts upon young people’s identities and a sense of self (Cuervo and Wyn 2014; Farrugia 2014, 2016). Through the use of qualitative longitudinal research, Thomson and Taylor (2005), guard against the use of simple typologies of localities that are fixed in time. Set across different spatial contexts in the U.K. this research highlighted how different localities have their own economies of mobility that tie young people to place, but this is influenced by factors such as ethnicity, gender, sexuality and social class. The longitudinal approach also illustrated the animation of resources available to young people (familial, cultural, social, material and symbolic resources) and their interrelationship with the agency of young people, the emergence of critical moments, and young peoples imagined future selves. This research was critical in highlighting how identifications with mobility could shift over time as young people’s biographies unfolded. This emphasis upon temporality links to the work of Farrugia on how rural young people respond to the mobile imperative, and thus ‘can no longer be located purely in one place, but are trans-local, or constructed through economic, symbolic and affective relationships between the multiple spaces through which they move’ (Farrugia 2016, 848).

The dominance of normative metrocentric models of youth transitions are also reflected in the way that policy makers construct the ‘problem/s’ (and solutions) of non-urban youth. For example, the policy context in the U.K. has sought to apply a more focused approach to tackling entrenched inequality via the development of an ‘Opportunity Area’ fund. Within this framework, policies to improve the educational performance of the most disadvantaged young people are foregrounded as a panacea to equalise opportunities and tackle entrenched inequalities (see DfE 2017 as an example). Within such narratives, policy makers marshal vast amounts of quantitative data to frame ‘problematic’ youth transitions, which in turn, reinforce the need for particular interventions. For instance, the measurement of educational outcomes have shown disadvantaged young people in coastal towns to be half as likely to gain two or more A-levels (or equivalent qualifications), half as likely to enter university when compared to young people in major cities of the U.K., and have lower quality apprenticeships as a path into employment (SMC 2017, 17).

Despite understandings of mobility and place being central to our understanding of youth transitions, mainstream research and policy approaches for non-urban youth are set against a normative metrocentric model that require a geographic disembedding to become 'successful'. This has particular consequences for the most marginal and disadvantaged young people who maybe lack the capital and resources to be mobile, or for whom place attachment takes on distinctly different meanings. Whilst, policy makers problematise the impacts of the 'most able' young people migrating from rural areas, for those who stay behind, the representation of the problem is often one of 'failing schools and poor teachers', and/or a lack of aspiration on the part of individuals/families who live in such localities to further themselves. The focus upon educational outcomes as the panacea to tackle entrenched inequalities not only detracts from the institutional structures that create 'failure', but has the impact of individualising responsibility onto the young people (and their families/communities). Arguably one of the most important arguments put forward by Furlong and Cartmel (2007) when theorising the impact of social change on young people's lives, is how 'the intensification of individualism means that crises are perceived as individual shortcomings rather than the outcome of processes which are largely outwith the control of individuals' … young people frequently attempt to resolve collective problems through individual action and hold themselves responsible for their inevitable failure' (Furlong and Cartmel 2007, 144). As we have seen, urban life painted as the ideal (successful) while the fortunes of those who stay in rural localities being synonymous with 'failure', are felt in complex, contradictory, and conflicting ways by young people. In order to understand the complex decision-making processes at play in the shaping of youth biographies, we need to appreciate how place is an important marker of identity and sense of self. This requires adopting a more relational approach to understanding youth transitions, where the concepts of place, place attachment, relationality and belonging are foregrounded.

Notions of space, place and belonging in young people's transitions to adulthood

Cuervo and Wyn (2014) reflect upon the relational metaphor of belonging for the theorisation and analysis of young people's lives, an approach that they argue: 'brings into focus the nature and quality of connections between young people and their worlds' (Cuervo and Wyn 2014, 905), connecting their past, present and futures, and exposing continuity and change in young people's lives through personal accounts of subjectivity and lived experiences. Cuervo and Wyn outline three key dimensions to the concept of belonging: (1) a sense of attachment to *place* as a form of belonging (2) meaningful relationships to *people* such as family, close friends and members of the community that foster a sense of belonging and influence young people's decision making; (3) and finally, a social generational approach that directs attention to concept of belonging in particular *times*. Here emphasis is placed upon the social, economic, political, cultural, and ecological dimensions of young people's lives that form the experience and consciousness of a generation. Taken together, these three dimensions of belonging – *place*, *people* and *times*, allow for a sharper focus on the significance of relationships in young people's lives that transcend social policies on education and employment, but are nevertheless heavily implicated in young people's transitions to adulthood. This framework provides insight into how relationships can be *enabling,* with the potential to foster a sense of belonging that is both meaningful and worthwhile. Within the context of entrenched inequality, notions of belonging can be instrumental in providing a sense of well-being and security (Cuervo and Wyn 2014).

Exploring the relationship between the cultural politics of inequality and particular localities, Farrugia (2019) has shown the making of classed subjectivities, whereby signifiers of

distinction (cosmopolitanism), create a cultural politics of place, which in turn, produce new forms of inequality. It is argued that this cultural politics of place can 'either stigmatise or valorise local places and young classed identities' (Farrugia 2019, 2) This conceptual framework has particular relevance for the political and public positioning of 'struggling coastal towns' in the U.K. For instance, TV documentaries, such as 'The Mighty Redcar' and 'Benefits By The Sea' embody narratives of marginalisation, disenfranchisement and disconnection from mainstream society. Accompanying these narratives can be powerful depictions of 'Broken Britain' that stigmatise and shame the subjects of investigation. Examples here include U.K. artist Jack Hurley's parody posters of seaside towns that present resorts such as Redcar with the accompanying text 'dystopia-on-sea', and images of Exmouth that show people vomiting over the promenade wall, local residents in tracksuits, and elderly residents with UKIP sponsored walkers. However, some of the most emotive language derives from popular tabloids and newspapers, illustrated through headlines such as 'Seaside towns have become dumping grounds for the poor' (Bingham 2013). The above representations of people and place signal tensions between pride and nostalgia of a 'successful' past, the shame and misery of the present, and a fear that the future is nothing but bleak. Within the U.K., the exposure of 'struggling' seaside towns have been amplified by the politics of Brexit. This has involved numerous journalists travelling the country to report on places that have been coined 'Brexitland'. Whilst such narratives may be symptomatic of post industrialisation and long-term economic decline, they feed a polarisation between the 'metropolitan Remainers' and the 'nationalist Leavers'. This risks further reinforcing the rural and urban divide, feeding the assumption that individuals and communities who voted for Brexit are somehow deficient, or backwards, for not sharing the same signifiers of distinction that surround cosmopolitanism. Through the concepts of identity, belonging and place, this paper will now turn to primary qualitative research that explored the ways in which disadvantaged young people make sense of their classed subjectivities in a context that is spatially stigmatised.

Methods

This article draws upon a qualitative piece of research with young people aged between 15 and 25 years that took place from late 2017 to early 2019. This programme of work included ethnography, participatory arts-based research, and semi-structured interviews (n41) with young people (15–25) who live in North Yorkshire, England. The majority of research (n31), including the ethnography and participatory arts-based element, took place in a deprived coastal town in the North of England. This coastal town has complex spatial concentrations of deprivation with average employee salaries amongst the lowest in England. It is the sample of 31 interviews from this context that are the focus of analysis for this paper. Purposeful sampling focused on recruiting participants who had experienced disengagement, or were deemed 'at risk' of disengagement from education, training or employment. Participants were recruited through two main gatekeepers, a detached youth work project, and an education and training provider. Despite attempts to recruit BME participants, all interviewees were of white U.K. ethnic origin. The challenges recruiting BME participants, were partly a reflection of the local population being predominantly white U.K. ethnic origin. Interviews lasted between 30 and 100 min. Participants received a £20 gift voucher as a thank you for taking part in the research. The research study received ethical approval from the University of York's Department of Social Policy and Social Work Ethics Committee.

Interviews followed a semi-structured format via a topic guide that focused upon the following areas: (a) the everyday lives of disadvantaged young people deemed 'at risk' from,

or disengaged from education and employment; (b) how young people see themselves and reflect on how they are perceived by others (c) understandings of their locality; (d) critical moments and biographies that understand routes to disengagement; and (e) hopes and aspirations for the future. Individual semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and the data analysed thematically. After careful reading and re-reading of transcripts, key themes and sub-themes were developed into a framework for triangulating and organising the material (Denzin and Lincoln 1998). Ethnographic observations, including fieldnotes and materials from arts-based activities, were also coded and incorporated into the analysis. The participatory arts-based activities involved working with a number of youth workers, local artists, and filmmakers. This included poetry workshops, the co-production of a short film, neighbourhood walks, drawings/collages, and the production of an immersive art installation that was displayed at a regional arts festival. When used in conjunction with the semi-structured interviews, these methods helped build greater rapport between the researchers and young people, as well as offering greater insight into the analysis of the interview data. They were also invaluable in illuminating lived experiences that cannot easily be put into words (Mason 2006), and enabled greater access for 'hard to reach' groups to be involved in the research. Overall, this provided a more holistic approach to understanding the young people's lives and the topic areas under investigation.

Findings

This paper now turns to the qualitative research with disadvantaged young people in a coastal town in the north of England. We will begin with a discussion of how young people navigate educational and employment trajectories, reinforcing the significance of histories of educational disadvantage and their intersection with weak local labour markets in shaping young people's lives. This will then be contextualised within young people's perceptions of identity, place and belonging, examining the ways in which individuals make sense of their classed subjectivities in localities that are spatially stigmatised and labelled as 'left behind'.

Youth transitions in a deprived coastal context: educational contexts and employment opportunities

Despite 'failing' coastal schools receiving a huge amount of public scrutiny (SMC 2017), rarely do we hear the voices of young people who navigate such contexts. Like other studies in deprived rural environments (Cartmel and Furlong 2000; Jamieson 2000), perceptions of formal schooling were often framed negatively. Many participants had left school early with extremely limited, or in some cases, no qualifications. When reflecting upon their experiences of schooling, many young people discussed the impact of their own 'problem' behaviour whilst in school (truancy, exclusions, poor behaviour), and how this influenced their educational credentials when leaving school and later engagement with further forms of education, training and employment. However, it is important to situate these accounts within the wider social context of young people's lives, where the intersection of multiple forms of deprivation and disadvantage shape young people's biographies. The following poem was written by a young 'care leaver' during an arts-based session with a lyricist. This young person had weak links to the locality having only recently moved into 'semi-independent living' in the area from a northern post-industrial mining town. This young person's biography was complex, having experienced poverty and hardship growing up, parental bereavement at the age of 10, and then being placed into local authority care at the age of 11 due complex circumstances which included his mother experiencing severe mental health problems. When describing school experiences, he draws upon hindsight ('school was crap')

and foresight ('If I had the chance to change time … I would knuckle down') to attach meaning to his school experiences:

> *If I could go back and turn back time, I would knuckle down and show it was my time to shine,*
>
> *Looking back at all my foster placements, it just goes to show how it tested my patience*
>
> *In school I was always excluded, people must think I'm hard and deluded.*
>
> *Going through school felt like I was on the wall of shame, because all I was going through was hurt and pain. (21 year old male, poem from a participatory arts project)*

Like other research (MacDonald and Marsh 2005), the young people in this study showed how limited resources, hardship and deprivation severely impeded experiences of schooling, which in turn, played a vital role in exacerbating social and economic polarisations. Unlike other studies in rural areas that have shown 'geographic disembedding' via educational 'success' to be 'within reach' (Pedersen and Gram 2018), this particular locality (encompassing entrenched, multiple forms of deprivation) meant the mobility imperative, whilst still present in young people's subjectivities of self, held different meanings, at different times, due to complex circumstances (i.e. the intersection of multiple disadvantages such as substance misuse, family conflict and mental health problems) and a lack of resources and support to be mobile. This highlights the importance of recognising the difficulties and multiple challenges that some of the most marginalised groups of young people face when navigating educational transitions.

When further reflecting upon educational participation, the young people were acutely aware of the labels attached to their schools and what this meant to their own identities as pupils. One of the most striking themes, however, was the awareness amongst young people of the intense scrutiny that 'failing' coastal schools in deprived areas had encountered (DfE 2017). Narratives of 'failure' infiltrated schools, influencing the discourse of teachers (see also Passy and Ovenden 2019; Corbett 2009), the narratives of communities and individuals, and the representation of local schools through local and national media. Here we see a dance play out between teachers and schools being blamed for failing their pupils, whilst young people, and the communities in which they reside, also being held culpable for lacking the ability and aspiration to further themselves.

> *There was nothing more I hated more than school (Q laughs) I hated it, which … It (name of school) was in extreme measures, it was … there was never a day without a fight, there was never a day without a teacher being like fired or something like that, we always had supply teachers, and I think that's what really in a way made me not want to go to college … all the teachers were always off, there was never a full-time teacher there; you would walk in on a different teacher every single lesson … you spent a lot of the lesson getting to know the teacher before they started teaching the actual subject … (17 year old female)*

The legacy of coming from a 'failing school', combined with variations in social, economic and cultural capital, had far reaching consequences on young people's perceptions and engagement with forms of education and training. Most young people felt transitions from

school to further education or employment were extremely problematic. Young people spoke of having received extremely limited or no careers advice and guidance and described a lack of power, agency and choice when navigating transitions between education, training and employment. The ethnographical data, involving sustained engagement at a youth project, provided a sense of time and movement with regards to young people's engagement with education and employment. While participants were not re-interviewed as such, informal conversations with the same young people over time demonstrated the challenges and obstacles they encountered. Here we witnessed young people's disengagement from education and employment unfold in real time. During this process, plans to further their education often fell apart. If young people were still engaged in education, future plans were often vague, uncertain and lacked direction. This was compounded by feelings of distrust and suspicion regarding formal systems of education where 'cash follows students', or where the churning between various training schemes was met with great scepticism. Similar to other research studies (Shildrick et al. 2012), the following account provides a graphic illustration of how a young person develops a deep sense of distrust when navigating various forms of training schemes in precarious, low-paid local labour markets. What is interesting here, is how this young person contextualises the strategies of 'masking' poverty and hardship behind the scenes of 'holiday making' in a coastal context:

> *Because everyone in authority is just masking (the problems), they want the tourists to see a nice seaside town, ice-creams, beach. And they aren't really helping people. Basically the job centre is in cahoots with every agency and what in x (coastal town), and they get paid for putting them on it, and then they get paid for you being on it, and then when you've finished you go back to the job centre and you do it all again. I don't want to do it, but for me to get money I have to. (25 year old male – Participatory arts-based film transcript)*

While this context of pre-18 educational disadvantage has profound impacts upon future employment outcomes, its intersection with precarious forms of employment, symptomatic of local labour markets, were deemed profoundly limiting. Many young people were disillusioned by their current situation; they were encountering constant knock backs from potential employers, had limited resources to travel out of the area to find work, and felt they lacked a 'competitive edge' due to insufficient qualifications and skills. Histories of educational disadvantage are particularly significant here. It is important to remember that these young people grew up in a context where they were acutely aware of what it meant to attend a 'failing school', of having deep feelings of being failed by that system, and then upon leaving school were branded 'failures'. Like other research in rural locations (see Rugg and Jones 1999; Cartmel and Furlong 2000), the types of jobs available were also heavily constrained by the coastal context:

> *Seasonal jobs I don't, like I don't get it, I just don't get it … what happens to all those people when the season's up, they're all out of jobs, so. (17 year old female)*
> *Young people work, its normally waiting on, holiday parks, you've only got like six holiday parks and they only have so many positions, so if loads of people apply for it your still in the same boat. Or you go to an agency, you get a zero-hour contract where you're not guaranteed any work, they take so much percent of what you earn, then they just get rid of you and get new one in. Full-time, it's all part-time. There's not a lot you can do when its seasonal. Once the tourists go that's about it, you know it's a vicious cycle. (25 year old male – participatory film transcript)*

For many young people, achieving their future career aspirations involved the need to move to a larger city where they perceived opportunities for young people to be greater. However, like other studies (Thomson and Taylor 2005; Jamieson 2000), when imagining a 'future self', the reality of 'moving away' was often met with apprehension and uncertainty. The tension between a desire to move away, with a strong attachment to place, highlights the complex feelings that surround mobility, and perceptions of 'success' and 'failure'. The following account is from a young woman who spent a significant amount of time in local authority care whilst growing up. As the narrative illustrates, it is her strong attachment to place, and the relationships with her community, friends and family who have supported her through extremely challenging times, that hold particular meaning when considering the mobility imperative (Corbett 2009; Farrugia 2016). Here we see the value of friendships and intergenerational relationships at play (Cuervo and Wyn 2014), and how proximity of care becomes critical in projecting a future self.

> *Like I'm physically prepared, like I'm old enough to go but I know in my own mind it'll be a bit too much stress on me because I'll be too worried about what my dad's doing or whatever; so I wouldn't be focusing on uni work I'd be focusing on what's happening at home. So I want to get, be able to get into that mindset and go, everything's fine, go do it. It's just at the moment I know ... I'd like to say I'd try moving away but I'm not too sure because it is my home town and it could be that home sickness, not just from being away from my dad, it'd just be the home sickness of the town cos it's all I've known. (18 year old female)*

For many in the study, this proximity of care was contextualised by their socio-economic circumstances. The following quote is taken from the same young women above who described a strong attachment to place and people. This quote illustrates reciprocity between family members, and the strategies employed by young people to protect their parents from the difficult feelings that were associated with managing hardship:

> *He (dad) said I don't have but I would just hand some money to him or just say, oh I'm off to put 20 quid on electric or 20 quid on gas, and stuff like that; he said he'd prefer me to do that instead of me handing him money, he'd just prefer for me to go, oh I'm off to go and put some money on gas, if I see it's low (18 year old female)*

However, the example of the young woman above can be contrasted with the following account from a young man who lives in similar socio-economic circumstances, lives in the same neighbourhood, and for whom growing up in local authority care was also a key feature of his childhood: 'Born here, but brought up all over … I were in care … So just had to move around a lot*'*. This young man paints a particularly difficult relationship with his birth family, and consequent foster placements (20 plus) that broke down whilst in care: 'I couldn't get close to anyone me, so I just did what I did, another place, another house, other people, that's about it'. In sharp contrast to the previous young woman, relationships with family, friends, and the community were perceived to be much weaker. It is within this context that the metaphoric qualities of the 'fish tank' are mobilised to describe a compelling account of feeling 'stuck', and going 'nowhere' in a structural context of limited opportunities:

> *When you live in x (coastal town) and you don't leave x (coastal town), you think x (coastal town) is the be all and end all. Its nowt, it's a dead end, it's a fish tank. Well it's like to look at, well, you've got the tourist side and then you've got the run down,*

you know, dirty, scruffy places. Not a lot of money goes into the area because the tourists don't see it … (25 year old male – participatory film transcript)

Being able to contrast the accounts of these two young people, show that even within groups of disadvantaged youth who share similar biographies, mobility imperatives and place attachment vary significantly, and are often dependent upon notions of belonging and intergenerational relationships. This not only reinforces the need to avoid simple typologies of localities that are fixed in time (Thomson and Taylor 2005), but they illustrate what Farrugia (2014) describes as 'a heterogeneous landscape of inequalities' (Farrugia 2014, 299) that unfold both *within* and *across* particular places. We are also reminded of the necessity to understand young people's educational and employment transitions within the wider context of young people's social worlds, and how social relationships, connections, and feelings of belonging, are heavily implicated in the shaping of young people's lives (Cuervo and Wyn 2014).

Place, identity and belonging

An awareness of coming from a deprived coastal town also meant seeing 'beyond the surface', being aware of how 'outsiders' (tourists) see them, and how 'insiders' (i.e. intergenerational differences) could reinforce spatial stigma via depictions of decline and loss. The complexities of navigating these tensions are captured succinctly by the following transcript where a young woman tries to communicate a complex attachment to place. While recognising that all is far from ideal, being labelled in derogatory terms, especially from those on the 'outside', was felt to be offensive and hurtful. These broad narratives of decline and loss dominate public discourse surrounding coastal towns, and have taken a profoundly stigmatising and damning turn, since the EU referendum. Mechanisms of 'othering' from 'different people' are hugely consequential on people's sense of identity and place:

Like it's (tourism) good sometimes because you get to meet like a lot of different people but … like if somebody said, oh that looks like a pile of poo or something like that, like sometimes you can get.., like offended cos it's where you grew up and it's like all you know and, that kind of annoys me … it's like somebody saying to you like, oh where you were brought up is a proper crap hole, and you kinda get a bit like, you know, you want to defend it cos it's all you've known and it's, basically it's your life really … you hear like the older generation talk a lot about how like amazing x (coastal town) was before and how it's turned into basically nothing … (16 year old female)

Similar to other studies (Slater 2017), experiences of spatial stigma were connected to feelings of segregation and exclusion from the benefits associated with regeneration and investment. Descriptions of their neighbourhoods being 'left behind' and 'run down', things being taken away and not replaced, were commonplace. When 'investments' were made (i.e. a newly built waterpark), these were felt to be inaccessible to local people due to cost. The distinction between things being built/invested in for 'them' (tourists) and not for 'us' (locals) were common themes. Young people described feelings of frustration and anger with the prioritisation of tourist spots, whilst local (stigmatised) neighbourhoods were neglected and left to 'run down':

> *There's nothing here for young people. We've got a water park but it's really expensive ... We've got one cinema which is like run down, and obviously they're trying to build a new one, which is gonna be so expensive we can't afford it anyway. And it's just, they build like apartments and stuff and they could be building like other things for us ... . (16 year old female)*

For some young people, talking about the Brexit involved reflecting upon some the wider narratives, such as the impacts of immigration, that have become synchronous with coastal towns that voted to leave:

> *Like a lot of the, the things that I have heard, and it might not be like a huge part of it (Brexit), but just talking to the people who got to vote is like people were saying, "oh we voted to leave, like to leave the European Union because we don't want these people being in x (coastal town), we don't want these here, we want to get rid of 'em", which I agree and disagree ... like I agree ... I think if they were coming up here they should at least, at, at least culture themselves before. And I disagree with them saying that people shouldn't be allowed in x (coastal town) because where else are they gonna go? Like I think that overthrows it for me a bit because you think about where they're from, what's gone on in them countries and how horrible things are going on there, like, and when it's families walking down the street and they've got their kids with them there's, the people in x (coastal town) would be like, oh get, like get out of our like home town. But then I look at 'em and I'm surprised to see like kids who could have been caught up in all the violence and stuff like that, and potentially lost their parents, lost their lives, and I would rather have them living down the road from me than living in fear somewhere else. (18 year old female)*

> *It's hard, it's really hard. Like if it weren't for my dad to get me this job I wouldn't be working, cos like they give like all the Polish people and all the foreigners and all that, a job straightaway as soon as they come over, but then like if we look for a job it's no, do you know what I mean ... (17 year old male)*

These accounts show a reflexive understanding of the wider macro forces that feed into narratives of decline, loss and frustration with the 'status quo'. However, they also illustrate young people's broader sense of their place within the world, moving away from the depictions of communities that are branded purely as 'racist' and 'backward', to more nuanced understandings of global forces, and a shared sense of responsibility for those deemed less fortunate than themselves. Whilst there are contradictions and tensions present in the quotations above, these need to be contextualised within the structural context of place, and how at particular times, place is mobilised by the media, and those more powerful, for political purposes. It is within this politically turbulent environment that young people are making sense of their surroundings and the world around them. In many ways, Brexit has become to be a cultural symbol and discursive representation of classed based inequalities that are structurally situated in place. The symbolic distinctions between the 'Remainers' (depicted as metropolitan) and 'Leavers' (depicted as nationalists) are mobilised within popular discourse to reinforce this. This reminds us of the contribution of youth studies in highlighting the production (and reproduction) of inequalities, and how when historically situated, we can witness patterns of inequality being reproduced in new ways, and in different contexts (Furlong and Cartmel 2007).

Conclusion and discussion

This article has provided a glimpse into what it is like to live and grow up in a coastal context where complex spatial concentrations of deprivation, filter through the everyday lives of people and places. Whilst these detailed descriptions of poverty and multi-dimensional hardship illustrate synergies with statistical evidence, they provide significant insights into what it *feels like* to experience entrenched deprivation associated with sustained economic decline. The findings illustrated how welfare institutions, such as education, compound their disadvantage and social exclusion. Being subject to attending a 'failing coastal school' infiltrated a sense of being failed and being seen as a failure. This then intersected with complex school to work transitions where low paid, precarious forms of employment created further barriers and obstacles. While the experiences of low pay, unskilled, insecure employment are similar to other studies with contexts of multi-dimensional deprivation (Shildrick et al. 2012), what sets the findings from this study apart, is the detailed descriptions of navigating a coastal context. In particular, the impacts of seasonal, low paid, insecure work, and how within rural environments, young people are forced to navigate a mobility imperative in order to withstand the 'poor' outcomes associated with the material inequalities of place (Farrugia 2016). Such localities have failed to receive the attention of major research studies on poverty and deprivation despite having some of the most entrenched indices of deprivation. This paper has provided important insights into what it is like to live and grow up in areas that are both geographically and economically on the periphery. It has shown how young people's identities are rooted in their localities and argued that in order to understand young people's educational and employment transitions, we need to understand young people's wider social context, in particular, perceptions of identity, place and belonging (Cuervo and Wyn 2014). In doing so, this paper has contributed to the growing body of research on non-urban youth, highlighting the significance of place based inequalities in areas of entrenched deprivation, and how the mobility imperative can consequently hold distinctly different meanings.

In situating structural forces within subjective understandings of place, identity and belonging, we were able to provide a more nuanced account of how individuals spoke of the frustrations of feeling forgotten and/or 'left out'. For instance, symbolic representations of prosperity (i.e. newly built water park) were out of their reach, but permeated their everyday lives. These themes are a driver for people seeking change, with the recent referendum on the U.K.'s membership of the European Union potentially providing an opportunity for those feeling 'forgotten' to vote for change. Whilst these narratives are often linked to debates that have become coexistent with Brexit (i.e. anti-immigration narratives), the dominant account within this study, was an awareness of decades of decline, but how it was tourists who were the main beneficiaries of regeneration and investment. These findings are of great relevance to the contemporary policy debates that surround deprived coastal towns. However, as the prospects of coastal towns move up the policy agenda, the representation of 'problem areas' require critical scrutiny. The findings of this study have shown the important role that place and people play as young people navigate transitions to adulthood. Through subjective accounts of what it is like to grow up in a deprived coastal town, we were able to provide a more situational, relational, and dynamic view of youth transitions that foregrounds the structural dimensions of place. In doing so, the findings challenge mainstream research and policy that couch 'problematic' transitions in individualistic terms, particularly the assumption that the 'failings' of disadvantaged young people result from an individual lack of aspiration or ambition.

As the world stage is watching the impacts of Brexit unfold, it is imperative that we create spaces for more meaningful dialogue on social justice. Only by listening carefully to the things that people care about within their communities, will we formulate an effective policy agenda that connects to the lived realties of poverty, hardship and marginalisation. The polarisation between different sections of the U.K. is a common point of discussion; polarisation between the young and old, between different classes, and between cities and towns. It may well be that deprived coastal towns are representative of an increasingly divided England, but the dichotomies between the anti-Brexit left wing liberal (metropolitan elite) and deprived 'Brexitland' coastal contexts, serves to reinforce divisions, and create a separation of 'us' and 'them'. The stickiness of these binary oppositions are unhelpful. Despite the future of British party politics looking increasingly challenging and uncertain, we are now at a critical juncture to move forward an agenda for change where equality and fairness play a more prominent role, and through which, the structural dimensions of place are given greater analytical attention. Responses to global forces, require local and regional decisions to be made that ultimately shape the opportunities available to young people. Addressing the reproduction of localised inequalities, requires policy makers and politicians to re-examine the causal processes that contribute towards profoundly unequal life chances. The lived experiences of young people navigating material inequalities, alongside the meanings, feelings and emotions that young people attach to particular places, should not only feed into the representations of their 'problems', but the policy and practice 'solutions' offered.

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